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(Nik Wallenda practicing his balance at Little Colorado River Navajo Tribal Park, May 2013. Photo by Geri Hongoeva-Camarillo, Navajo Parks & Recreation)

“A Dream Come True”

CAMERON, ARIZONA – A prayer and a dream.

That’s what builds a new path or will take you to new heights....literally. Case in point, Navajo Nation Park Manager Helen Webster and World Famous Tight Rope Legend Nik Wallenda each had a dream.

It was a dream they had envisioned for many years....they just didn’t know their dreams would connect them. Webster is a park manager for Little Colorado River Navajo Tribal Park, which oversees the Little Colorado River Gorge on the western outskirts of

the Navajo reservation. Located just off the beaten path, it is a haven of solace that has been uniquely sculpted by the hands of Mother Nature. Wallenda on the other hand is a non-Navajo from Sarasota, Florida.

Webster began working for the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Department in February 2006. It was never part of her goal in life to work for the Navajo Nation, but she believes everything happens for a reason.

In the beginning, Webster said she had to start from scratch to get the park off the ground. Reflecting back, Webster said her first major project was to establish a fee booth, which she

accomplished in a record time of four months. Her vision then, which continues today, is to have state of the art infrastructure and facilities to create an accommodating atmosphere for visitors.

Webster said, “Despite all the challenges and obstacles, I really enjoy my job. My goal is to provide quality customer service – I want our visitors to enjoy their visit here at Little Colorado River Gorge.”

Over the years and one step at a time, Webster worked to help install an entrance fee station, improve fencing, install picnic tables, develop a hiking trail, install signage and waterless restrooms while never losing hope that one day she would see paved parking.

Then one day there was an element of surprise when Location Scout PJ Connolly introduced Webster and Wallenda. It seems the “King of High Wire” wanted to fulfill a life-long goal and walk across a towering canyon without a harness. As fate would have it, Wallenda marveled the towering canyon walls at Little Colorado River Gorge as the perfect location to honor his great grandfather Karl Wallenda who died after falling from a tight rope in Puerto Rico in 1978.

Wallenda was captivated by the rustic and mystic beauty of the Navajo Nation and viewed Little Colorado River Gorge as the ideal place to achieve his ambition. It would be the highest walk he would attempt in his life yet. Webster saw this as an opportunity of a lifetime.

Although there was concern about the limited infrastructure and how an event of this magnitude could even happen, the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Department rose to the occasion and agreed to work with Wallenda and make his dream come true.

Hence, many discussions and meetings have been held over the past several months to make this event become a reality. It is not an easy task, but the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Department is working diligently behind the scenes to produce a triumphant event for the world to see.

In fact, just the land clearances alone took more than 10 months to complete. Some of these requirements included consent from local land users, and a biological, environmental and archaeological survey.

Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Department Manager Martin L. Begaye, said “We are very honored and pleased that Nik Wallenda has selected the Navajo Nation as a location to help him achieve his life-long goal. Hosting an event of this caliber requires a lot of pre-production planning and approval. As stewards of our land, we are working cooperatively with many different individuals and entities to ensure that we also preserve and protect our natural resources so that future generations will continue to enjoy our native homeland.”

Echoing Begaye’s comment, Geri Hongeva-Camarillo, media representative at Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation, said “We began video production in April to promote the majestic beauty of the

Navajo Nation. During the two-hour long broadcast from the Discovery Channel, spectators will see and learn about the Navajo Nation.”

The video will feature interviews with various Navajo leaders, distinguished Navajo people and it will showcase our tribal parks. Moreover, the Nik Wallenda Tight Rope Event is generating a lot of interest from worldwide media and the Navajo Nation is doing whatever it can do lay out the red carpet. There will be a fashionable ensemble of local Navajo entertainers who will perform at a nearby location for the first 600 people who are fortunate enough to watch the event on a jumbotron. Due to limited space, the public is encouraged to view the event on the Discovery Channel.

Considering the scope and distinction of this first-ever historic event, NBC and the Discovery Channel are collaborating to produce and air the June 23rd event live beginning at 6 p.m. It is estimated that more than one billion people from throughout the world and more than 100 countries will be able to see the live telecast.

As an act of goodwill and a spirit of camaraderie to the Navajo Nation, NBC hired a contractor to pave a road to the Nik Wallenda Tight Rope site and a parking lot specifically for the media. It was quite the challenge. What normally takes years or months took only a matter of days to lay a new foundation and pathway....It was like an overnight transformation.

Webster said, “I have been praying for improvements to Little Colorado River Navajo Tribal Park ever since I started. I had no idea NBC would be able to pay for a new road and parking lot for us. This is what you call a miracle.”

Begaye, added, “We have always wanted to make major improvements at Little Colorado River Navajo Tribal Park, but were unable to do so due to limited funding. We are very grateful to NBC for helping the Navajo Nation.”

Webster said after the event is over, she would like to see the new paved area as a new way to promote Little Colorado River Gorge, adding, “I want to thank my immediate staff , co-workers and other individuals who are assisting to make this event come to fruition. It is amazing to know just how many people from throughout the world will be able to catch a glimpse of our beautiful Navajo culture. After they see the video, I hope they will want to visit the Navajo Nation.”

And interestingly, it all started with a prayer and a dream from two individuals of two different worlds.

For more information about the event, please contact Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation at (928) 871-6647 or obtain information on their website at www.navajonationparks.org

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